



4 FIRE ZONE BLITZES

FROM THE 3-4 “BLACK HOLE” DEFENSE

Traditionally I have always been a multiple defensive system that morphs with the changes and tendencies of an opponent's offense. Though I have transitioned from an odd (3-4,5-2, and 5-3) or an even (4-3, 4-4) as a base core defense over the years one thing remains the same....my defensive philosophy. My defensive philosophy is to attack my opponent's offense, give multiple defensive looks, give multiple coverage looks, produce turnovers, and gamble on my opponents tendencies and make them do what they do not want to do! The game of football is one big chess match between the offense and defense and as a defense you may have to look ahead three moves!

With the rise of spread offenses and the change of personnel at my school, I have personally adapted the 3-4 as my base defense. Unfortunately, through the years my kids have gotten smaller, quicker, and more agile and the huge defensive lineman have gone away. Since I have limited defensive lineman, I would rather use my speed and agility to match the openness of spread offenses with linebackers and defensive backs. So rather than fit a square peg in a round hole we are going to put a round peg into a round hole! Though this may give us a slight disadvantage against power formations/running teams, I use a bunch of movement and quickness to counter my opponent's size advantage on the line of scrimmage. I also like to see how the noseguard disrupts the center-QB snap exchange on the high school level as well! I have seen teams like the NFL teams Pittsburgh Steelers, New England Patriots, NCAA teams like Alabama Crimson Tide, and high school teams like Briar Woods H.S (VA), and Geneseo H.S (IL) flourish and win championships using this defensive system. I personally have had a lot of success using this defensive system and have been a part of an state championship, state-runner-up, and multiple region and district championships in my short 12 year career as a football coach!

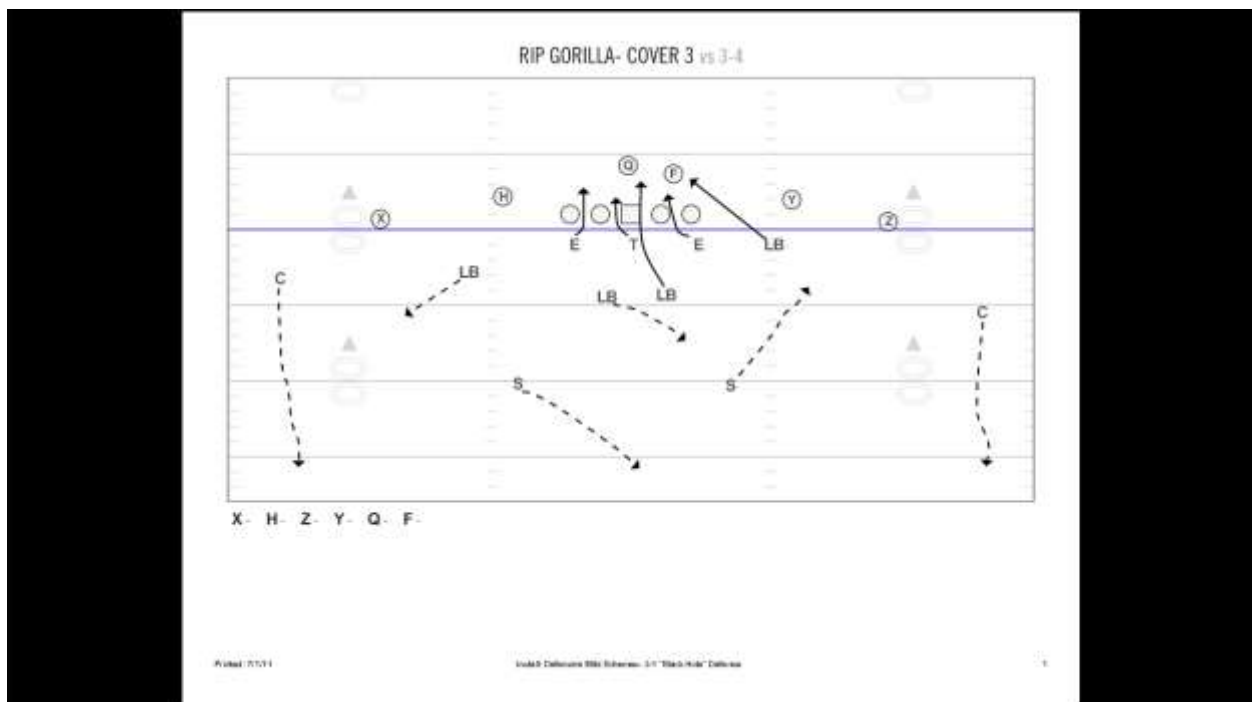
In this article, I am going to share with you my four favorite fire zone blitzes. A fire zone blitz usually have a couple of common components: you are rushing 5 defenders, covering behind the blitz with a traditional 3-high and 3-under zone coverage, and maybe the drop into a zone or spy against a screen with the weakside defensive rusher added as well. The main philosophy of the fire zone blitz scheme is to bring pressure and attack the offense without giving an “all chips in” gamble with man-on-man coverage behind the blitz. In my defensive system there are a bunch of tags and calls to change up different blitzes...rather than having 20 different named blitzes I have 10 core blitzes with different tags. For sake of the use of diagrams in this article, I drew up the weakside defensive end always going inside the outside defender. Now that does not mean that I give up the weakside edge everytime I run a fire zone blitz....I will tag his attack based on QB personnel, down & distance, tendencies, and game circumstances. So for example when I have the backside defender drawn up going inside it may be on a non-traditional pass down, maybe with a QB who has limited mobility, or in a case-by-case scenario based off of tendencies. We can tag him to rush inside, rush outside, or drop into coverage depending on game situation. My



staff and I do hours of work watching film, game planning, and finding tendencies on our opponents....fortunately all offensive coordinators have some tendencies and it is our job to find those tendencies! I know this because I when I call plays, I find tendencies within my own playcalling duties! The inside linebacker must be very mobile and be able to play from sideline to sideline and cover a bunch of ground...technically the drop linebacker will be covered up and will get to flow with action! Though there are some “bubbles” in the defensive secondary to exploit, the overall goal of the blitz is to get to the QB or disrupt the run blocking schemes quick enough not to get exploited for a touchdown.

The first fire zone blitz that I will discuss is called “Gorilla”, and it is a fire zone coming from the strongside of the defense. The strongside OLB, known in our defense as the “Stud”, will be coming off the edge. The strongside defensive end will rush inside gap, not running up field beyond 1 yard from the LOS (line of scrimmage) before breaking down and reading the play action. The strongside ILB, known in our defense as the “Sam”, will be blitzing the strongside “A Gap” and read/react to play action. The noseguard will shoot the weakside “A-Gap”. Once again, I will tag the weakside rusher to shoot inside, rush outside, or drop/spy into coverage based off our research on our opponent. (See Diagram 1) The strong safety rotates the coverage by occupying the curl to flat zone to the strongside. The weakside OLB, known in our defense as the “Will”, will have the weakside curl to flat zone. The free safety will rotate to the middle deep 1/3 zone. Both corners will bail to their prospective deep 1/3 zones as well. One of my favorite “tags” that I can call is “switch” where the prospective blitzer switches gap responsibility with his nearest defender. So I can call “Gorilla Stud Switch-Cover 3” and the “Stud” will switch gap responsibilities with the strongside defensive end. The Stud would then go “B-Gap” after the defensive end who would loop outside to control outside “C-Gap”.

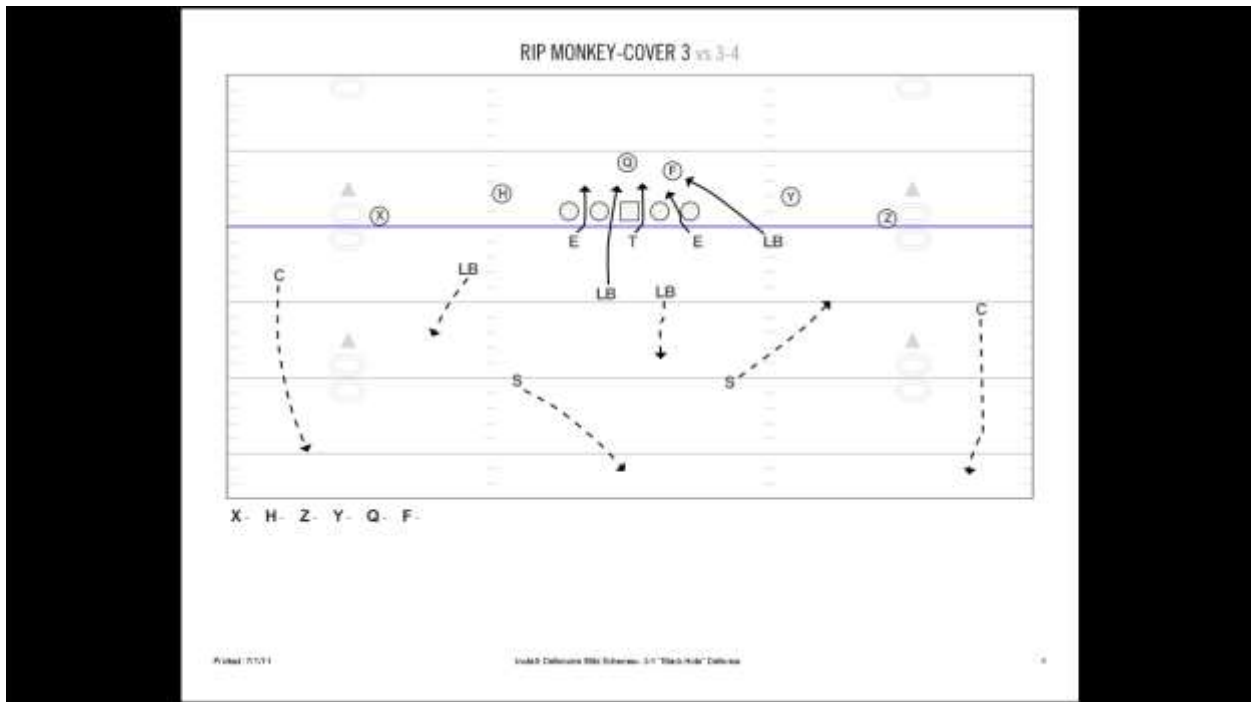
DIAGRAM 1



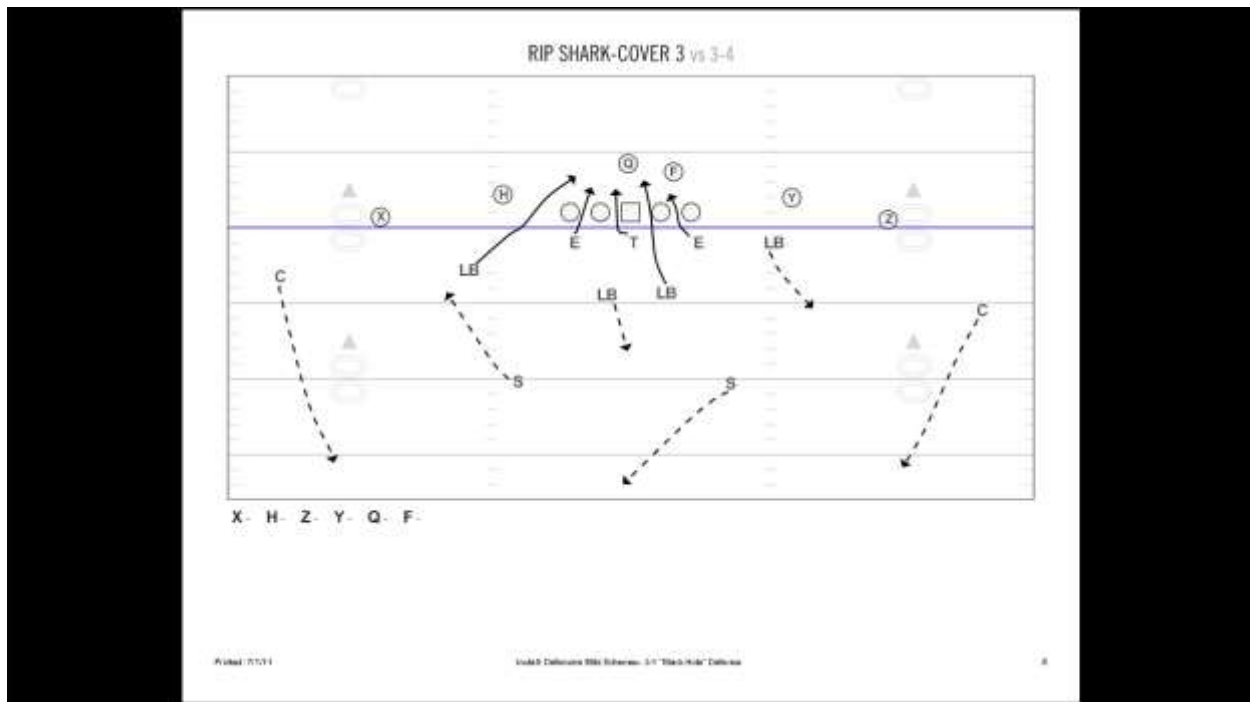


The second fire zone blitz I will discuss is called “Monkey”, a fire zone blitz coming from a combination of the strongside and weakside of defense. The “Stud” will be coming off the edge. The strongside defensive end will rush inside gap, not running up field beyond 1 yard from the LOS (line of scrimmage) before breaking down and reading the play action. The weakside ILB, known in our defense as the “Mike”, will blitz the weakside “A-Gap” and our noseguard will shoot the strongside “A-Gap”. The weakside DE will be tagged with a rush call based off research. (See Diagram 2) The defensive secondary will rotate to a 3-deep and 3-underneath zone coverage as seen below.

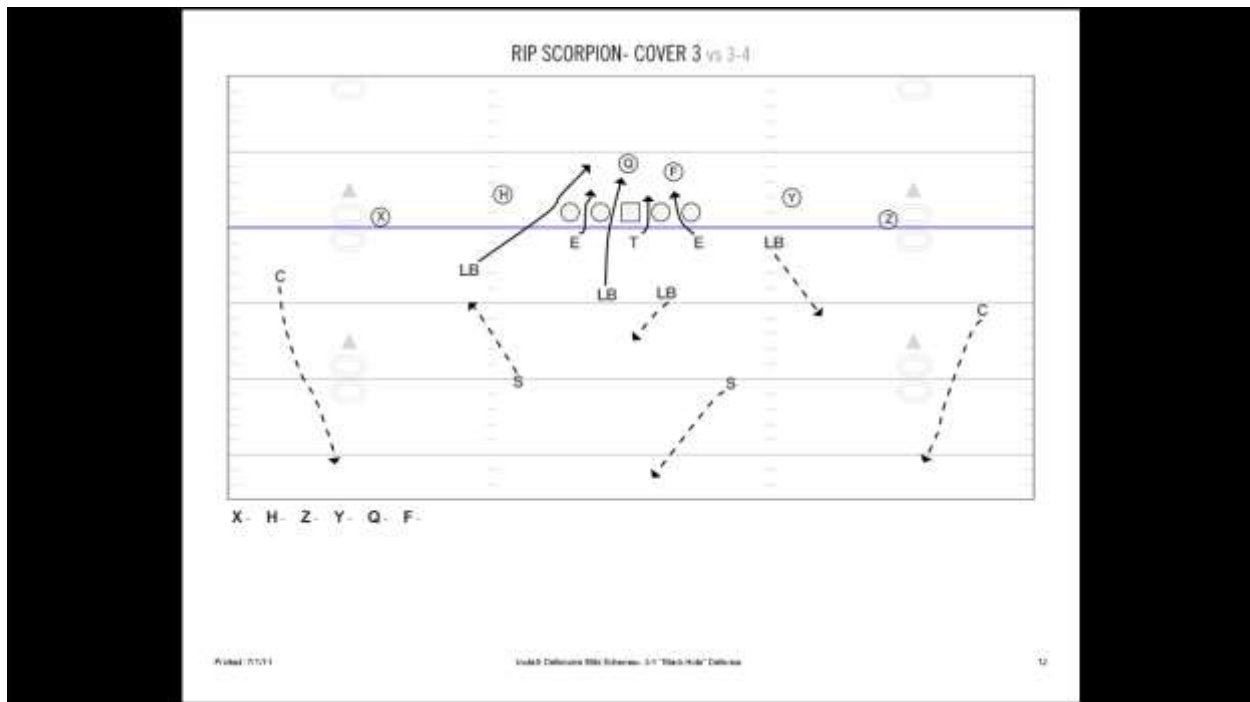
DIAGRAM 2



The third fire zone blitz that I will discuss is called “Shark”, which is a combination of a weakside and strongside blitz very similar to the “Monkey” blitz. The “Will” will come off the edge and the weakside defensive end will rush inside gap, not running up field beyond 1 yard from the LOS (line of scrimmage) before breaking down and reading the play action. The noseguard will shoot weakside “A-Gap” and the “Sam” will blitz strongside “B-Gap”. The strongside DE will get a tag call based off of research and tendencies. The “Stud” will rotate to curl-to-flat zone coverage. The Free Safety will rotate down to cover the weakside curl-to-flat zone. The Strong Safety will rotate and cover the deep middle 1/3 zone. Both corners will bail to their prospective deep 1/3 zones as well. (See Diagram 3).



The last fire zone blitz that I will cover is called “Scorpion”, which is a blitz coming from the weakside. The “Will” will come off the edge and the weakside defensive end will rush inside gap, not running up field beyond 1 yard from the LOS (line of scrimmage) before breaking down and reading the play action. The “Mike” will blitz the weakside “A-gap” and the noseguard will go strongside “A-Gap”. The strongside DE will be tagged accordingly. The Free Safety will rotate down to cover the weakside curl-to-flat zone. The Strong Safety will rotate and cover the deep middle 1/3 zone. Both corners will bail to their prospective deep 1/3 zones as well. (See Diagram 4).



Good luck to all of you and remember even though there can only be one champion on the field...you all are champions because you help change lives, schools, communities, and the world! God Bless you all and your student-athletes!

Jared Van Acker

Coach Jared Van Acker was hired as the new head football coach at Freedom (South Riding) High School, a 5A school located in Northern Virginia last year. He was the former head football coach at Grafton High School, located in Yorktown, Virginia. He led the Clippers to three consecutive 4A playoff appearances, winning the Region 1 championship in 2011. At the end of the 2010 season, he was named Coach of the Year for the Bay Rivers District. Jared completed his seventh year as a head football coach, with three prior years at Galax High School in Virginia. Prior to Galax H.S., he served three years as an assistant coach at William Campbell High School in Virginia, where he helped coach the Generals to a state championship in 2005. He served one season as an assistant at Carthage High School in Illinois, where they finished as state runner-up. He played three years of college football at Quincy University, located in Quincy, IL. He received his Bachelor's Degree from Western Illinois University and graduated from J.D Darnell High School in Geneseo, IL. He recently received his Master's Degree from Ohio University as well. He has had numerous professional articles that have been published by the national football coaching magazine, American Football Monthly. He also has a DVD-series based on his offensive and



special team schemes produced by American Football Monthly as well. He has been married to his wife Kim, for eight years and they have a 5-year old son, Caleb, and a 1-year old son, Mason.